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# "LITTLE CHARLES"

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# "ALBEMARLE"

Two Episodes in a Family Story



By

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## The "Little Charles" and the "Albemarle"

On a recent visit to North Carolina we stopped overnight with General John Elliott Wood, now retired and living in Currituck on the shores of beautiful Currituck Sound. General Wood, who is possibly a distant kin of our family, is well versed on local history and on the old families of Eastern North Carolina. Through his good offices I was shown the house in nearby Shiloh, North Carolina, where once lived a certain Peter Elliott, thought to have been the oldest son of the original Peter Elliott and an elder brother of the first Gilbert Elliott in our family. The house is still standing about 15 miles from Elizabeth City and not too far from Camden Court House.

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The present owner of the house, Dr. Elizabeth C. McPherson, was not at home at the time of our visit, but on the way back through Washington, we stopped over and made her acquaintance. She proved to be a very interesting person employed in the manuscript division of the Library of Congress and quite a bit of a genealogist in her own right. With her help, I was able to learn the exact date of the marriage of the original Peter Elliott to Tamar Burgess (October 8, 1790) in Norfolk, Virginia, and to obtain photostatic copies of certain letters now in the manuscript section of the Library of Congress which contain the story of the "Little Charles" as I tell it here, and also tell us quite a bit about her builder, Charles Grice, and his family. These letters, known as the "Causter-Pickett Papers" after the names of two North Carolina Congressmen, tell the story of the unsuccessful efforts to obtain payment from the United States Government for the loss of this ship to a French Privateer. Most of the letters were written by Sarah A. (Grice) Elliott, daughter of the builder and the lady who married the first Gilbert Elliott. There are, however, also a letter written by Charles Grice himself giving the current prices of various commodities in those days, two by Sarah's brother Warren, written from New Orleans where he had migrated, and there is also an affidavit by an old lady of Elizabeth City named Harney, who remembers seeing the ship a-building and whose nephew sailed in her, never to return.

Altogether these letters tell a story which is interesting in itself, and is especially so to descendants of the Grices and Elliotts for whom I have written it.

As to the "Albemarle" built by Charles Grice's grandson, its famous story has been often told. Now that we are approaching the 100th anniversary of its exploits, and because none of the versions of the story I have seen tell it to my satisfaction, I now make bold to tell it here again, as it forms a part of the history of our family.

GILBERT ELLIOTT

Kingston, N. Y.

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## THEORY OF THE EARTH

### CHAPTER 2

THEORY OF THE EARTH  
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## The Story of the "Little Charles"

We do not know the exact date of Charles Grice's birth. His father, Francis Grice, is said to have emigrated from Wales to Philadelphia and his mother to have been a Miss Brockenburgh of New York. It is also said that he came from a family of ship builders. One of his daughter's letters gives the date of his death as 1833 and his age at 70, which would mean he was born in 1763, well before the Revolution, and the place of birth was either Philadelphia or nearby Germantown in Pennsylvania.

At the tender age of 17 we hear of him marrying a Miss Mary Bryan of New Jersey. In 1785, his wife's health being poor and believing that a sea voyage would benefit her, he set sail from Philadelphia with his wife and two small sons aboard a sailing vessel headed south. When the vessel reached Ocracoke Bar where there is an entrance from the Atlantic into the Great Sounds of North Carolina and near the present day Kitty Hawk, his wife died.

He continued his voyage, however, and reached the tiny port of Camden, North Carolina, situated on the Pasquotank River near where it empties into Pasquotank Sound. Here he proceeded to do some exploring. His practiced eye noted that there were many fine stands of timber hereabout, suited to the building of ships. He also found there two young men named Sawyer with whom he soon made friends. Enoch Sawyer was Collector of the Port of Camden, his brother Lemuel was a lawyer. In an interesting book about the local history called "300 Years Along the Pasquotank" and written by Jesse F. Pugh of Old Trap, North Carolina, its author states that these brothers held many public offices. In later years when President Monroe toured this part of North Carolina he was entertained by members of this Sawyer Family.

Across the river from Camden the friends eyed a fine field of corn owned by a rather eccentric old lady named Mrs. Elizabeth Tooley. They noted the broad stretch of well drained level land and the gentle slope down to tidewater deep enough to float a goodly vessel. Ideal for a town and shipyard was their conclusion. North Carolina was growing at a terrific rate and as we shall see, shipyards were humming.

The three young men decided, if possible, to buy this cornfield in partnership, lay out a town and a shipyard. However, the old lady was stubborn and flatly refused their first proposition. She just wouldn't sell. But they were not lads to be easily discouraged. Next year Charles Grice was back again. They increased their offer and in addition each would give the old lady a calico and silk gown, rare in those parts in those days. And finally, and here was the deciding rub, the town they proposed to lay out would be named after her. This final blandishment was apparently just too much for the old lady. She accepted their offer, Charles Grice laid out a town on the model of his native Philadelphia, and Elizabeth City it is to this day.





Meanwhile he had secured himself a house in Camden (still standing) and was preparing to build himself one in Elizabeth City across the river. We are told that he had the main sections of the house prepared in New Jersey and shipped to Elizabeth City by boat. Its site was probably that of the present day Robertson mansion directly opposite the Pasquotank County Court House. For it was on this site that a house once stood that was occupied by Gilbert Elliott, the son-in-law of Charles Grice, and was destroyed by fire in 1880.

He had also married again, in fact he was a much married man having had six wives in all. Here are their names and the years in which he married them -

Mary Bryan	about 1780
Keziah Munden*	August 19, 1790
Brittania Gray	1794
Margaret (Peggy) Jones**	1797
Lucy Ferebee***	1803
<i>Grandy</i> Mary <u>Gandy</u>	March 19, 1805

The first wife, as we have seen left two sons. The last wife from whom we are all descended had four children, two boys and two girls. Of children of the other wives we know nothing except that one account states that he had thirteen children in all.

Of Mary Gandy's four children, the oldest was Warren, who later settled in New Orleans. There were two daughters, Margaret, whom my father used to call Aunt Molly, and Sarah Ann who married the son of Peter Elliott. Margaret was evidently a woman of great beauty and we have a lovely portrait of her in my sister's possession. Her husband, Mueller, was a Brooklyn organist. Another brother is not further identified.

In her letters Sarah Ann tells us a good deal about her father. She says that at one time he was sheriff of Camden County and a general consultant in law cases. He built stores and mills, as well as ships and at one time was a very rich man. At the time of his death he was Clerk of the County Court (probably Pasquotank County). She further states that he was noted throughout his life as a "strictly reliable business man."

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\* In some accounts this name is spelled Murdan. There were both Mundens and Murdens in early North Carolina. But as it is supposed that all his wives had money and the Mundens had more than the Murdens, I am inclined to favor this spelling.

\*\* A daughter of Joseph and Mary Jones, well known in Camden County, according to "300 Years Along the Pasquotank."

\*\*\* Possibly related to the Ferebee who married Isaac Gregory, grandfather of Tamar Burges.





Like the Elliotts after him, Charles Grice was a firm believer in education, and for his girls as well as his boys. We find him bringing a Mr. Charles Kinney, south of Elizabeth City, to act as tutor for his children. Furthermore, anyone reading Sarah Ann's letters could see that she was a well educated woman, something that was not too common in those days. As to his reliability as a business man, my father often told this story about him. He had a friend in New York named Ketchum with whom he did a great deal of business. Through him he purchased merchandise for his trading with the West Indies. He must have had great confidence in this man for at one time he endorsed his note for \$50,000.00, a fortune in those days. When news reached Elizabeth City that Ketchum had failed, and he would be called upon to pay the note, he was said to have remarked simply, "Well, we can pay if they will give us time." And pay he apparently did. However, it appears that this financial disaster sharply curtailed his activities.

In his shipbuilding another disaster lay ahead, but before telling this story I must digress a bit to discuss the position of the American Merchant Marine immediately following the Revolution. Our 13 American Colonies stretched out along the Atlantic Coast for a vast distance. Roads were scarce and travel over them mostly by horseback, therefore a large part of their commerce with one another must needs be carried on by sea. What more natural then that the early American shipyard should be a very busy place and that the sound of the shipbuilders' adzes and hammers were heard from Maine to South Carolina. England and France, as we shall see, were not particularly pleased over this state of affairs. Handicapped by continual wars and with good timbers scarce and expensive, they soon found that the Merchant Marine of this vigorous young nation was rapidly overhauling them. It already stood third among shipowning nations, might soon be first. And what was worse, not only were American ships good ships but the American sailors who sailed them were among the best.

We soon, therefore, begin to hear of decrees and orders in council applied with the idea of restraining American trade. American ships for instance, were forbidden to carry on trade between the West Indies islands and their respective mother countries. Another order differentiated between what products an American ship could carry to Europe. It might only carry the produce of its own state. As the raw materials, such as cotton and tobacco were largely produced in the South, and the ships were largely owned in the North, this order created great confusion and hardship.

Matters got so bad that John Jay was dispatched by our Government to England where he negotiated his famous treaty which closely defined the different kinds of trade with England that American ships might engage in. As a result of this treaty American shipowners began to adopt what is known as the "broken voyage" policy. A ship with a cargo of West Indies origin would discharge it at an American port and the duty there would be paid. It would then immediately reship this cargo and set sail for a British port and all would be legal.

The treaty negotiated by John Jay settled for a short time matters with the British. Not so with the French. The infamous Robespierre and the French Directory were then in





control of the country and when our government ventured to send them a note protesting against their interferences with American trade, they returned an insolent reply. Napoleon, succeeding the Directory, found himself engaged in a life and death struggle with the English. One of his principal ideas was to strangle England by destroying her trade. But this was not easy to do. If British ships were forced to keep to their ports trade could still go on carried in neutral bottoms, chiefly American. This Napoleon did not propose to tolerate. Crippled when Nelson destroyed his fleet at Trafalgar, he inaugurated what was called his "Continental System". With his "Berlin Decree" of 1806, followed by his "Milan Decree" of 1807, he attempted to strangle this trade by making American vessels entering any port controlled by him, subject to seizure if their cargo was of British origin. Worse yet was the "Rambouillet Decree" of 1810. This made pretense that any American ship entering a French port, or a port in a French Colony, was there illegally according to American law and so subject to seizure.

Under the terms of these infamous documents about ten million dollars worth of American shipping was seized in the ports of France, Spain, Holland, Prussia, Denmark, and Norway, countries then under the control of Napoleon. Strangely enough only Russia stood up to Napoleon and refused to seize American shipping. It was this refusal which eventually led to Napoleon's invasion of Russia and his ultimate downfall.

In the midst of such a turmoil of nations it was that the "Little Charles", described as a schooner and named after her builder, Charles Grice, ventured forth from Elizabeth City on a voyage to the West Indies. Sarah Ann in her letters says she believed the master of the ship to have been named "Carnot" but there is also mention of Francis Grice, a son of Charles Grice and probably one of the two little boys whose mother died at Ocracoke Bar, being aboard. In her affidavit, Elizabeth Harney, the old lady who saw her being built, states that it was in the year 1811. She is said to have been returning to port when seized by a French war vessel or privateer and among her cargo were some "expensive silks". According to her builder, ship and cargo were valued at \$33,000.00, a great sum for those days.

Now comes the frustrating part of the story. When Charles Grice learned that his ship had been taken by the French, he no doubt was in haste to notify the authorities in Washington and make a claim for compensation. Diplomacy in those days, as in ours, was a slow matter. Probably the American minister in Paris protested this seizure as he did some others that took place about that time. In fact, for a few weeks we were actually at war with France, a period that was not too pleasant for French men of war that might be lurking about our shores or in the West Indies. But Napoleon was nearing his Waterloo and although the war was called off on French promises of reparation, no reparations were immediately available. His successors in power probably pleaded poverty.

It is said that Schieffelin & Co., the well known wholesale druggist who still flourish near Cooper Union in New York, had two of their ships seized by Napoleon.

Death came to Charles Grice in 1833 in Elizabeth City. His daughter relates that until his dying day he never ceased his efforts to obtain indemnification for the loss of his



ship. No doubt, careful business man that he was, he had a complete dossier of the facts with dates and names of persons and places relating to the loss. Probably he also had some affidavits to support his claim, from people living at that time. As we shall see however, these irreplaceable documents were all destroyed during the Civil War. Meanwhile, our government continued to make vigorous representations to the French. Payment was promised and eventually the French did pay us something. One account said they only paid for three ships although the number sunk was considerably more. As for the British they refused all claims and the War of 1812 resulted.

After the death of Charles Grice, his widow and daughters carried on the claim. In her letters Sarah Ann says, "The facts about the claim were impressed on the mind of every member of the family from earliest childhood." Not long after her father's death, the "French Spoliation Claims" bill came up in Congress for the first time. A William B. Shepard who represented the Edenton district of North Carolina in Congress, was sponsoring it. Apparently both houses of Congress passed the bill but Sarah Ann remarks succinctly, "It was vetoed." This was before the former Mary Gandy, Charles' widow, died, which was in 1840.

Meanwhile Sarah Ann had married the young lawyer who was the first Gilbert Elliott. He might have successfully pushed the claim through, but unfortunately, he died in 1851 at the early age of 38. The fight, therefore, was left to Sarah Ann and her brother Warren Elliott, who had gone to New Orleans to settle.

Unfortunately, while the events of the case were still fresh in the minds of many persons then living, the Civil War intervened and all thoughts of such things were put aside during that terrible conflict. Sarah Ann, prudent woman that she was, realizing that Elizabeth City would be easily exposed to Union attack, hastily despatched her precious papers to a friend at South Mills, a little settlement not far away, surrounded by the Dismal Swamp. She tells us that among the things she sent was a casket containing her "Chattel Properties" and her husband's Masonic Apron. Here her papers rested undisturbed throughout a great part of the war and the occupation of Elizabeth City by Federal troops. Late in the war, alas, a regiment of colored troops in Union service got into South Mills and destroyed "All that she had preserved about the Little Charles and the French Claim."

Sarah Ann must have been a woman of great determination. Even with these setbacks she did not give up. On February 14th, 1885, we find her writing a letter from 114 Bute Street in Norfolk, where she was then living. The letter was to a certain Mr. Goode who appears to have been a bit of a lobbyist. In it she refers to a Miss Lou Dorsey whose father she states was a shipping merchant of Baltimore. She mentions a "Francis Grice" who she states was a nephew of her father, Charles Grice, and says that he was a well known naval constructor for the United States Navy. She mentions that she had paid her share of the cost of a pamphlet setting forth the facts about the war claims. She also mentions two brothers, three nieces and two nephews in New Orleans.





In 1874 the bill was again introduced into the House of Representatives. This time the sponsor was Causten. Sister Molly, then living at 71 West 11th Street in New York City, was helping too. She had been to her representative in Congress from this district in New York, none other than Fernando Wood, the notorious founder of Tammany Hall.

This time, we are told, notwithstanding the efforts of these gentlemen, the bill "died in committee". Sarah Ann herself, died in Oxford, North Carolina, on April 22, 1891. And with her the story of the "Little Charles" apparently comes to an end. My father, a lawyer himself, used to talk frequently about the claim. I remember once hearing his sister (later Mrs. James Crowds of St. Louis), urge him to look into the matter. But he never did, realizing I think, how difficult it would be to maintain a case before the Court of Claims without some documentary evidence. Also, the family was even then widely dispersed over the United States, just locating all who would have an interest in the claim, would be a monumental task. One strange legacy the "Little Charles" did leave. On December 10th, 1843, was born to Sarah Ann a second son who was named Gilbert after his father, her first son having been named Charles Grice Elliott, after his grandfather. This boy was also to build a ship, one that would become famous, but would also be lost during a war. Although this Gilbert adopted the legal profession, like his father and younger brother Warren, undoubtedly his first love was ships, and we must now tell you about the one he built.



## The Story of the "Albemarle"

We know little of Gilbert Elliott's boyhood in Elizabeth City. Probably, his grandfather's shipyard was still there. Possibly it was at work abuilding ships and the young man watched and got to know something of the shipbuilding trade and how vessels were constructed. Although he later followed his father into the legal profession his first love was surely the waters of the great sounds about the city and the gloomy swamp just to the north which later inspired him to write a poem. Furthermore, the lawyer with whom he was to learn the legal profession, William Martin, owned a shipyard himself not too far away. This lawyer incidentally, was to help him financially when the time came to build his ship.

At the outset of the Civil War, his elder brother Charles Grice Elliott, was active in helping to organize the 17th North Carolina regiment. Gilbert, although only 17, went along as adjutant, and succeeded in getting himself made prisoner by the Federals under Ben Butler, when the latter captured Roanoke island. Fortunately, he was soon exchanged and found himself at liberty once more and had a chance to take stock of the situation. He must have asked himself earnestly how his knowledge of ships could be used to aid the embattled confederacy. Federal troops were in Elizabeth City and Federal ships patrolled the Sounds, but up the Roanoke river apiece, was a small town named Scotland Neck controlled by the Confederates and where young Gilbert had friends. Among these was a young lady named Hill whom he afterwards married. Her sister's husband, a young man named Peter Evans Smith, was a good friend of Gilbert's. He had graduated from the University of North Carolina with honors in Engineering. He had taught himself photography, watchmaking, the mending of locks and guns; had designed a cotton planter and a method of shrinking iron tires on carriage wheels. Surely this young man knew how to get things done and would be a tower of strength in the project that Gilbert was then planning.

Meanwhile up in Richmond, John L. Porter, the chief construction officer of the Confederate navy might be a good man to consult. He it was who fathered the ram "Virginia" better known under her old name of "Merrimac" and was matching wits with the Federal navy from morning to night. He counseled a somewhat smaller and more easily maneuverable ship than the "Merrimac", something about 153 feet long and 45 feet beam, something that would not require a well equipped shipyard to construct.

William Ruffin Smith, Peter's father owned a plantation at Harper's Ferry on the Roanoke, just above Scotland Neck. His cornfields stretched down to the river in a long gentle slope. Not ideal of course, but a possible place to build a ship. Time was pressing and there being no other place available to them it was in this cornfield that the two young men, aided by Gilbert's younger brother Warren, went to work. But first a contract for the construction of the ship must be signed with the Confederate government. My father has often told the story. Only 19 years old, young Gilbert let his beard grow before presenting himself to Navy Secretary Mallory in Richmond. The stratagem worked and Gilbert returned to Scotland Neck with a signed contract, ready to begin work.







A great deal has been written about the building and fighting of this ship. The best account I have seen is that written for the old Century magazine by Gilbert Elliott himself, and published in their issue of July 1888. Even this errs on the side of modesty because it says little about the dangerous missions which Gilbert undertook in the course of her fighting and does not sufficiently emphasize the perseverance and tenacity it required to get this boat finished and under way under the most disadvantageous conditions. In his story he says, "It was next to impossible to obtain machinery suitable to the work in hand. Here and there, scattered about the surrounding country, a portable saw mill, a blacksmith's forge or other apparatus was found; however, the citizens of the neighborhoods on both sides of the river were not slow to render me assistance, but co-operated cordially in the completion of the ironclad, and at the end of one year from the laying of the keel during which innumerable difficulties were overcome, by constant application, determined effort and incessant labor day and night, success crowned the efforts of those engaged in the undertaking."

And there in that cornfield, the first "Twist Drill" ever to be used in the United States, came into being. Again I give the builder's words, "The work of putting on the armor was prosecuted for some time under the most disheartening circumstances on account of the difficulty of drilling holes in the iron intended for her armor. But one small engine and drill could be had and it required at best, twenty minutes to drill an inch and a quarter hole through the plates. It looked as though we would never accomplish the task. But necessity is the mother of invention, and one of my associates in the enterprise, Peter E. Smith, invented and made a twist drill with which the work of cutting a hole could be done in four minutes, the drill cutting out iron in shavings instead of fine powder." My father used to say that Peter Smith never received a cent for this most valuable invention, nor did he receive anything for his later invention of the flashing light buoy, the light being actuated by the motion of the waves and still in use by the United States Government along our coastal waters.

These iron plates were mostly rolled at the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond. Gilbert and Peter had a hard time to get them and made several trips to Richmond to persuade Mr. Sharpe, manager of the works, to let them have enough to finish their work. Grant was pressing Richmond hard and the Confederacy was short of almost everything.

Once completed, the hull was floated up to Halifax about twenty miles up the Roanoke where the machinery and armament were to be installed. The superstructure contained an opening at each end and one on each side. Two rifled Brooke guns were so placed that they could fire through the ends or through either side, a facility that later proved most advantageous. The prow, of solid oak, faced with iron, came to an axe-like point. Propulsion was by two 200 horsepower steam engines with twin propellers in the stern. So eager were they to get the "Albemarle" into action that they started to float her down the river before she was actually completed. Forges were erected on her deck and as she floated along, blacksmiths and carpenters were kept hard at work putting on her finishing touches.



The Confederate Government had appointed a grizzled veteran Captain J. W. Cooke, to take command of the "Albemarle", and he now invited its builder to go along as his special aide. On the morning of April 18th, 1864, all was finally in readiness and the ship left Hamilton on the Roanoke and floated down the river in Gilbert's words, "Going stern foremost with chains dragging from her bow, the rapidity of the current making it impractical to steer with her head downstream." In this fashion they got to within a mile of the battery at Warren's Neck, held by the Federals. Now, however came warnings. Some word of what was going on upriver must have reached the Federals for they had driven piles into the river bed, sunken several hulks and affixed a row of torpedos set to explode if touched by a keel. Under cover of the night, Captain Cooke sent out an exploring expedition under the command of one of his lieutenants who returned and reported that it was impossible to pass the obstructions.

Gilbert, however, thought differently. He knew well every inch of this river. The spring freshet was then at its height and it was the highest in years. He asked and received permission to do a little exploring on his own. Here are his words. "Captain Cooke cordially assenting and pilot John Luck and two of the few experienced seamen on board volunteering their services, we set forth in a small lifeboat taking with us a long pole and proceeded to take soundings. To our great joy it was ascertained that there was ten feet of water over the obstructions." Returning about one o'clock in the morning to the "Albemarle", Captain Cooke on hearing Gilbert's report, immediately slipped his cables and the ram proceeded down river and passed Warren's Neck without the Federals being any the wiser. Below lay Plymouth, a key point in the control of the sounds and strongly held by Federals under General Wessels. The strategy was that a Confederate Army, under General Hoke should attack on the landward side while the "Albemarle" shelled the Federals from the Roanoke.

But Plymouth was not to be easy picking. Two Federal gunboats, the "Miami" and the "Southfield" came steaming up the river to challenge the ram. They had a total of 15 guns to the "Albemarle's" two, but the brave men aboard stood out to meet the challenge. Here is the story in the builder's words. "The two ships were lashed together with long spars and with chains festooned between them. The plan of Captain Flusser, who commanded, was to run his vessels so as to get the 'Albemarle' between the two which would have placed the ram at a great disadvantage, if not altogether at his mercy. But pilot John Luck, acting under orders from Captain Cooke, ran the ram close to the Southern shore, and then suddenly turning toward the middle of the stream and going with the current, the throttles, in obedience to his bell, being wide open, he dashed the prow of the 'Albemarle' into the side of the 'Southfield', making an opening large enough to carry her to the bottom in much less time than it takes to tell the story. Part of her crew went down with her.

"The chain plates on the forward deck of the 'Albemarle' became entangled in the frame of the sinking vessel, and the bow was carried down to such a depth that water poured into her portholes in great volume, and she would soon have shared the fate of the





'Southfield' had not the latter vessel, on reaching the bottom, turned on her side thus releasing the ram and allowing her to come up on an even keel. The 'Miami' right alongside had opened fire with her heavy guns and so close were the vessels that a shell from a ten second fuse, fired by Captain Flusser, after striking the 'Albemarle', rebounded and exploded killing the gallant Captain Flusser and almost tearing him to pieces. In spite of his death, an attempt was made by his crew to board the ram which was heroically resisted by as many of the crew as could be crowded on the top deck, who were supplied with loaded muskets passed up by their comrades below. The 'Miami', a powerful and very fast sidewheeler succeeded in eluding the 'Albemarle' without receiving a blow from her ram and retired below Plymouth into the sound."

Her two opponents vanquished, the way to Plymouth now lay open, but it was still held by the Federals and it was important that a liaison be made with General Hoke commanding the Confederate ground forces. Gilbert Elliott in his small boat had crept up close to the town and observed that there was great activity there; apparently the Federals were moving women and children to some place of safety and preparing for an attack. To make this liaison with Hoke, Captain Cooke again called for volunteers, someone familiar with the swamp country back of Plymouth would be ideal. Again Gilbert Elliott stepped forward. During the night he successfully reached General Hoke's headquarters by a path through the swamps and regained the "Albemarle" by daylight reporting that all was in readiness for an attack. The "Albemarle" started to shell Plymouth at dawn, while Hoke attacked by land. The fortifications were carried, though not without heavy losses and the Union General, seeing the situation was desperate, surrendered the town.

But the "Albemarle's" fighting had only just begun. The following day she sailed out into the sound below Plymouth and encountered a fleet of seven Federal gunboats under the command of Captain Melancton Smith. There ensued one of the hottest fights in the history of Naval warfare. Here are her builder's words. "They approached in double line of battle, the 'Mattabesett' being in advance. They then proceeded to surround the 'Albemarle' and hurled at her their heaviest shots at distances averaging less than 100 yards. The 'Albemarle' responded effectively. (The 'Wyalusing', another double ender, had to withdraw in sinking condition) but her boats were soon riddled, many iron plates on her shield were injured and broken and the after gun was broken off eighteen inches from the muzzle, and rendered useless. The terrible fire continued without interruption until about 5 P.M. when the commander of the Union double ender, 'Sassacus' selected his opportunity and with all steam on, struck the 'Albemarle' squarely just abaft her starboard beam, causing every timber in the vicinity of the blow to groan though none gave way. The pressure from the revolving wheel of the 'Sassacus' was so great that it forced the afterdeck of the ram several feet below the surface of the water and created an impression on board that she was about to sink. Some of the crew became demoralized but the calm voice of the undismayed Captain checked the incipient disorder with the command, 'Stand to your guns and if we must sink, let us go down like brave men'."



The "Albemarle", however, soon recovered and sent a shot at her assailant which passed through one of the latter's boilers - the hissing steam disabling a number of her crew. Yet the discipline on the "Sassacus" was such that notwithstanding the natural consternation under these appalling circumstances, two of her guns continued to fire at the "Albemarle" until she drifted out of the area of battle.

The "Albemarle" remained master of the situation, having only lost one man, and the Union gunboats drew off, but she was in no condition for further adventures. She made port that night by burning bacon and lard under her boiler, her smokestack being so riddled that it would no longer draw. She tied up at the river edge where she was prepared for a thorough overhauling. A boom of spars lashed together was thrown round her and the repair work was begun. The Union commanders were ignorant of the extent of the damage done the "Albemarle" and made no attempt to approach Plymouth lest they again encounter that valiant ship and her crew. On the night of October 27th, 1864, as the Civil War was drawing to its close, it witnessed one of the most daring episodes in sea history. Lieutenant Cushing of the Federal Navy, approaching Plymouth in a small steam launch under cover of the darkness, succeeded in planting a torpedo under the "Albemarle" which sent her to the bottom. Her protector destroyed, Plymouth was recaptured by the Federals on October 31st of that year.

Several years later, in 1867, the war being over, the "Albemarle" was raised from her river bed, patched up and towed to Norfolk where she was sold for junk. Somehow or other, her tattered smokestack was saved and may now be seen in the Hall of History at Raleigh, North Carolina. So ended the tale of the "Albemarle" and the gallant men who built her, fought in her, and fought against her. In all of our Civil War, crammed as it is with exciting events, there is no more thrilling episode than the story of this ram, and the descendants of the man who built her may well be proud of his name.

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